

## **Humanities 3925: Interfaces: Technology and Human. 2009-2010**

Professor Jody Berland

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### **About the Course**

This course examines shifting relationships between humans and technologies from an interdisciplinary humanities perspective. Drawing on history, philosophy, cultural studies, fiction and popular culture, the course emphasizes human-machine interfaces in structures of belief, artistic practices and identity formation. The course addresses the transformation of powerful religious, political, and sexual belief structures in the wake of the growing technological mediation of knowledge and everyday life. It examines changes in social and aesthetic practices precipitated by new technologies. Finally, we turn to the issue of the human individual in this milieu, with the emergence of the individual-as-cyborg and the "virtual self" raising profound questions regarding conventional understandings of what constitutes "the human."

**Interfaces: Technology and the Human** is intended to provide students with an opportunity for critical reflection on the relationship between self, culture and a variety of forms of technology. The course reflects an interdisciplinary humanistic perspective focusing on deep changes and continuing dilemmas in a social environment increasingly saturated with such technologies.

### **About the Course Director**

Jody Berland, Associate Professor of Humanities, has been at York since 1993. Her research addresses culture-technology interactions in sites as diverse as Canadian nationhood, music broadcasting, weather forecasting, water pollution, player pianos, the internet, and the world of domestic pets. Author of *North of Empire* (2009) and other works, her research explores everyday experiences and objects as changing intersections of technology, space and culture. She is the editor of *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* ([www.yorku.ca/topia](http://www.yorku.ca/topia)).

### **Required Texts**

J. Berland (ed), *Humanities 3925 Coursekit, 2009-2010*

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Dover ed.)

Andrew Murphie and John Potts, *Culture & Technology*. Palgrave 2003

Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

William Gibson, *Idoru*

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*

## Assignments and Evaluation

- \* Reading journal, 10%
- \* Posting and participation in course website, 10%
- \* Mid term exam: 20%. Distributed November 12, due November 26.
- \* Term Paper: An essay that takes an in-depth look at an actual "interface" drawing upon course concepts and individual research (10 Pages): 25%. Due March 11.
- \* Final exam: 25%. Distributed March 25, due April 2.
- \* Class Attendance, preparation and participation: 10%

## Schedule of Classes/Readings

### **September 10 Introduction, film screening**

#### **September 17. Humans and the Interface**

Raymond Barglow, "The Technological Mirror," *The Crisis of the Self in the Age of Information: Computers, Dolphins and Dreams*, pp 11-18. (notes, 208-9).

McLuhan: Excerpts, *The Gutenberg Gallery, Understanding Media*. In *The Essential McLuhan*, 106-161, 174-179. (Edited by Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone. ISBN 0-88784-565-7. Both in J Berland, *3925 Coursekit*, 2009.

#### **September 24. What do we mean by Technology?**

Langdon Winner, "Technologies as Forms of Life," *The Whale and the Reactor*.

Murphie and Potts, "'Culture' and 'Technology,'" pp 1-10, *Culture & Technology*.

#### **October 1. The Interface Makes Us...**

Lev Manovich, *Language of New Media* **63-115**.

Steven Johnson, "The Desktop," *Interface Culture* Ch 2, pp 42-75

#### **October 8. Human.**

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

#### **October 15: Reading Week**

#### **October 22. When Old Technologies Were New**

*Frankenstein*, Part 2.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. 'Capitalism and the Labour Process' ; Lewis Mumford, "Tool-Users vs. Homo Sapiens" and "The Megamachine" from *Philosophy of Technology: The Technological Condition*. Oxford, 2003

#### **October 29. Technology and cultural change: what's happening?**

Carolyn Marvin. 'Annihilating Space, Time, and Difference: Experiments in Cultural Homogenization' in *When Old Technologies Were New*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

**November 5. Technology and Cultural Change, Part 2**

Murphie and Potts Chapter 2, “Theoretical Frameworks.”

**November 12. Interfacing Distance: Technologies of Speech**

McLuhan “The telephone, *Understanding Media*, 233-240  
Leopoldina Fortunati, “The mobile phone as technological artifact.” In *Thumb Culture: The Meaning of Mobile Phones for Society*. Transcript Verlag/ Transaction Publishers, 2005.

**November 19. Interfacing Distance: Technologies of Sight**

Robert Romanyshyn, “Self as Spectator,” Ch 3, *Technology as Symptom and Dream*  
Kevin Robins, “The Space of the Screen,” *Into the Image: Culture and Politics in the Field of Vision*. Routledge 1996.

**November 26 Mechanizing Vision**

Susan Sontag, “In Plato’s Cave,” *On Photography*, Delta Books 1977, 3-24.  
Don Ihde, “Visualism in Science,” *Bodies in Technology*, University of Minnesota Press 2002, 37-49  
Film: I am a movie camera

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**January 7 The (inter) Face**

Virginia Blum, “The Monster and the Movie Star” in *Flesh Wounds: The Culture of Cosmetic Surgery*  
Sandor Gilman, “Judging by Appearances” in Gilman, *Making the Body Beautiful*  
Film: Michael Jackson’s Face

**January 14 Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep**

Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*

**January 21 Technology / body/ self**

Scott Bukatman: “X-Bodies: The Torment of the Mutant Superhero” in Bukatman, *Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Supermen in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

**February 4 Musicking 1**

Jody Berland, *The Musicking Machine*  
Michael Chanan, “Recording Electrified,” *Repeated Takes* 54-70, notes 182.

**February 11 Musicking 2**

Hosokawa, Shuhei and Hideaki Matsuoka. ‘On the Fetish Character of Sound and the Progression of Technology: Theorizing Japanese Audiophiles’ in *Sonic Synergies: Music*,

*Technology, Community, Identity*. Edited by Gerry Bloustien, Margaret Peters and Susan Luckman. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2008. p 39-50. ISBN 978-0-7546-5721-7

**February 18: reading week**

Assigned reading: *Idoru*; Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs."

**February 25 . Virtual love.**

William Gibson, *Idoru*

**March 4 Cyberquake: Machines and humans**

Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs,"

Murphie and Potts, "Cyborgs," Chapter 5, *Culture & Technology*

**March 11 Interfacing with the enemy**

Murphie and Potts, Ch. 7, "Getting Wired: War, Commerce and the Nation-State."

Arthur Kroker, "The New Biometric State," *Born Again Ideology: Religion, Technology and Terror*.

**March 18 Playing with Life**

Sarah Kember, "Cyberlife's Creatures." *Cyberfeminism and Artificial Life*, Chapter 4, 83-115.

**March 25 Oryx and Crake**

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*

**April 1 Complete Oryx and Crake, Course summary**

**Recommended Reading (on Reserve)**

Balsamo, Anne. *Technologies of the Gendered Body*

Bukatman, Scott. *Blade Runner*

Franklin, Ursula. *The Real World of Technology*

Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*

Gergen, Kenneth. *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*.

Herman, Andrew and Thomas Swift. *Contemporary Theory and the World Wide Web*

Levy, Pierre. *Cyberculture*. Trans. Robert Bononno

Marvin, Carolyn. *When Old Technologies Were New*

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media*

Romanyshyn, Robert. *Technology as Symptom and Dream*

Tofts, Darren, Annemarie Jonson, Alessio Cavellaro (eds). *Prefiguring Cyberculture: An Intellectual History*

Winner, Langdon. *The Whale and the Reactor*

*Other resources to be posted on course website*

